



DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DATE: March 13, 2020
TO: PRIESTS ON OFFICIAL ASSIGNMENT
FROM: BISHOP FRANK J. DEWANE
RE: ADDITIONAL CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS

Pursuant to my previous memos regarding precautions to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus), please see the additional information outlined below.

During these trying times, the Holy Father asked us to pray that the Holy Spirit give us the strength and courage to accompany the Faithful and help them draw comfort from the Word of God. He calls us to remember those suffering from this pandemic and inspires us to continue our service to the sick by bringing them the Eucharist and other sacraments.

- Out of pastoral concern for the health and wellbeing of all of our people, I have decided to offer the following dispensations. I dispense from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass those who are sick and those providing care for them, those with chronic medical conditions or severely compromised immune systems, those whose age or frailty causes them to be at greater risk, those that have been exposed to the coronavirus and those who because of anxiety may decide not to attend Mass.

As long as any of the above-referenced conditions continue, this dispensation shall remain valid.

- Note: Those who refrain from attending Mass due to above conditions should, if possible, devote time to prayer or observe Mass on television or the internet. While nothing can replace attending and participating in Sunday Mass or receiving Holy Communion, those who refrain from Sunday Mass due the above conditions have not committed a sin.
- If permitted to enter a healthcare facility, you, your Deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharistic, are to follow all hospital and nursing home safety measures and precautions. If you are called to visit a parishioner in their home, proper precautions should be followed, including minimizing the duration of the visit, refraining from touching the person or anything in the home/room and maintaining appropriate social distance.

- All missals and other printed material that may be handled by parishioners should be removed from the pews since there will not be enough time between Masses to properly sanitize them. If using worship aides, they should be used one time and disposed of after each Mass. In addition, efforts should be made to display the words of the hymns, and other parts of the liturgy if possible, on screens or walls within the Church.
- Collection baskets should be retrofitted to include a handle for the ushers to use as they pass through the congregation, which will eliminate the need to pass the basket from person to person. A possible alternative, that could be utilized until the baskets are retrofitted, would be the establishment of fixed collection locations within the Church with ushers standing next to the basket for the offertory. If this short-term option were implemented, it is suggested that this take place during the exit from Mass as opposed to conducting it during Holy Communion. Hopefully, by the following week, the collection baskets can be modified, or new ones ordered, to accommodate the new procedure.
- The doors to the Church should be propped open or held open by a greeter before and after Mass to minimize the number of surfaces parishioners need to touch.
- If a Parish receives a call or other notification from a Parishioner, especially those that are elderly or living alone, notifying the Parish that they are sick, the Parish should track this information and call the Parishioner in a few days to check on them and to offer encouragement and compassion.

If you, your Deacon or lay Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist (EM) are called to visit a person quarantined in their home under the threat of the coronavirus, please follow the guidelines below:

- Call the patient to learn the circumstances of the quarantine: How long has the patient been quarantined? What is the patient's current status? Has the patient been tested and diagnosed with COVID-19? Are other family members present to assist in the visit? Is the patient using a mask to reduce transmission?
- A patient who is at home is likely not severely ill. If the patient is using a mask, have other family member(s) present to help them momentarily remove their mask for Communion; if you maintain an appropriate distance and if Communion is received in the hand, a brief visit (1-2 minutes at the bedside) is not likely to be unduly hazardous to the otherwise healthy person. If you give Communion in the mouth, please carefully drop the Host into their mouth without touching the patient.
- Other than the 1-2 minutes at the bedside to distribute Communion, you, your deacon or EM should stand at a distance from the patient (more than 6') to speak with and pray with the patient. The patient should be wearing a mask. No physical contact should be

- made with the patient other than placing the Host in the hand of the patient who then briefly removes the mask to consume the Host.
- Hands of the visitor should be fully and carefully washed before leaving the home and nothing should be touched as the home is exited (it is recommended that you bring your own paper towels to dry your hands after washing). Hands should be fully and carefully washed upon arriving back at the parish.
- The car door handle, the steering wheel and any other areas of the car that have been touched while traveling should all be disinfected after the visit.

For the health of the Faithful, you and your staff, I would kindly request that you share these guidelines with your Parish staff to be implemented without delay. As always, I take this opportunity to extend to each of you the assurance of my continued consideration and prayers. Please join me in prayer for those that are sick, caring for the sick and all medical personnel.

We will continue to monitor the situation and issue updates as appropriate on the Diocese of Venice website.

Thank you.